

High As Hope by rydittaker

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M

Language: English

Characters: Grace Byers, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lonnie Byers, Patricia Horowitz, Will Byers

Relationships: Jonathan Byers & Joyce Byers, Joyce Byers & Original Character (Mother), Joyce Byers & Will Byers, Joyce Byers/Bob Newby, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers/Lonnie Byers

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Summary:

A chronological group of cannon-ish one-shots depicting Joyce Byers life based off the songs from Florence + The Machine's album - High As Hope. Rated 'Mature' due to frequent mentions of sex (and rape), death, substance abuse (drugs and alcohol) and physical/mental abuse.

1. June

Notes for the Chapter:

June - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sq0ukFzUc8>

It had been two weeks since we left. We'd been in Chicago for three days. New York was fun but it was way too expensive for us, so we moved. Everything in Chicago seemed so much bigger than home. I couldn't believe that we actually made it.

I always wondered if Mom and Dad worried about me, they probably didn't care. They would have been more frustrated that I left with Hop instead of the fact that I had actually left. If it wasn't for Hop, I would have been stuck in Hawkins. I didn't want to be stuck in that hell hole for my entire life.

I remember one of the days there vividly. Hopper was asleep. The poor soul was completely exhausted, he'd been out every day looking for work, looking for anything for the both of us. I had only been out once since we got there, everything became too much whenever I tried to go out. I didn't mind looking out the window and observing everything through the glass but actually being outside, feeling so small in such a big place, it terrified me. I honestly don't know why I agreed to go. I guess I would have done anything to get out of there and when Hop suggested it - it seemed like the best option.

I didn't even know what jobs I could get out there, maybe something in the public sector, I thought. Maybe a secretary? I could type seventy words per minute, that had to count for something, right? There weren't really that many job vacancies that advertised for a sixteen-year-old girl from Indiana. Hop would get something, though, Hopper was always bound to find something. But if he didn't find anything I had no idea where we would go, my mother would let me come home but my Dad wouldn't. He wouldn't even let me step one foot onto the front path without making a spectacle. He'd ask why I had left when he knew it was his fault. If he had treated me better - if he had treated Mom better... I wouldn't have been in that position. Leaving would have never crossed my mind. I felt so sorry for my

Mom, I shouldn't have left her with him, I probably made things worse. I'm sorry, I guess I was being selfish.

Hopper was still sleeping, he always rolled about, he only stayed still when I would cuddle up to him. I didn't know why I felt so safe in his arms. In his embrace, I felt like I could do anything, accomplish anything, he would encapsulate me in warmth and I would feel safe. He was like an angel, so radiant and full of hope but then I heard his heartbeat and I was reminded that angels do not exist.

I was scared to turn the television on, I didn't want to wake him. I would never do it, living outside of the bubble was never my thing.

I wanted to enjoy that moment, being there with him, being free but together.

2. Hunger

Notes for the Chapter:

Hunger - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GHXEGz3PJg>

I couldn't do it. I wasn't good enough for the windy city. Hop was though, they lapped his charisma up the second he presented a faint smile. I wasn't "pretty" enough for them. I would sit in our hotel room and wait for him to get back from 'work', whatever 'work' was, he refused to tell me. He became too busy to try and find anything for me so staying inside became an inevitability. It got to the point where I couldn't deal with him coming back each day and demanding me to do things. So I got up before the sun came up, packed what I had and left. I went to go back to New York, but I thought, if I can't find something here in Chicago how the hell am I gonna find something in New York. So I came home.

I never expected any open arms, I didn't even make my presence known to my parents, there was no point. I stayed with friends from high school who were willing to let me sleep on their couch for a few nights, Karen let me stay the longest, she understood what I felt. I had very quickly overstayed my welcome, so I took the money she had kindly given me and headed to the only remaining place I was welcome, Benny's. He told me I could stay as long as I needed and he would pay me if I was willing to waitress, which I was.

Months went by and I hadn't heard anything from Jim, I don't know why I was expecting something, he had no idea where I was, yet I still waited. The inkling of love I had felt was long gone and I never expected it to return. That was until an old face walked into the diner one Saturday afternoon, Lonnie Byers. The last time I had seen him was when we were still children, when we had our lives ahead of us. I served him, he ate and then left. Instead of a tip, he left his number, that was the first time in more than a year that I had felt that feeling. That feeling that I had given up on and had never expected to return so suddenly, love.

We went on a few dates and I suspected nothing. We then started

dating and I thanked Benny for his kindness and moved to the outskirts of the town. I didn't mind settling for a while, I yearned the feeling so much that it got to the point where I would do anything for it.

He started pointing things out like how much weight I had gained and he would only bring food home for himself. Eventually, I stopped eating altogether, I only started to suspect something was wrong when he told me he knew a guy who could help. That should've been the red flag, but I ignored it, I didn't want to lose that feeling again.

I did whatever he told me to, it was a way to pass the time. I thought maybe Hop will come back or maybe my Mom will reach out, they never did. There were times where I couldn't move, I was paralysed, left to rot away as if I was a corpse. But it felt good, he would praise me and the pain would wash away. Sometimes he would drag me out to clubs, he would give me something to take and then I would dance the night and the early morning away. It became a regular thing, so regular that there were points where I wouldn't come home for weeks. I couldn't help but think that I could've done this in Chicago or New York, Hopper wouldn't let me do it but I didn't have to tell him, I guess that was our problem. I would occasionally wonder what he was up to in Chicago or wherever he was at that point. I was still waiting for him to say something, anything but I had lost hope. I couldn't even recall who I was half the time so when I heard a rumour that he had been shipped out it went over my head and I never questioned where he was again.

I had forgotten.

3. South London Forever

Notes for the Chapter:

South London Forever - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lua-N4OrPKA>

There were nights where I would stumble home with someone I had just met. I wouldn't ask for their name, it was always "please them, never please yourself" and then you would part ways.

I would stumble past Mom and Dad's house almost every night. Every time I would stop and would consider going in, and every time I would dismiss the thought and keep walking. I would pass Benny's and want to go in and say hi, but I would keep walking. I was always high on something, whether it be life, love, something that had been slipped into my drink, something Lonnie had forced down my throat, it was always something. I thought "it doesn't get better than this" but the feeling would start to wash away and I would beg for more. More of anything - anything that would replicate that feeling. Ecstasy, shrooms, cocaine, heroin, salts, opium, meth, acid - anything.

Sometimes I would wonder out with someone and not come home. I always liked to go to the museum and climb up onto the roof. I would regularly sneak out as a child to read up there. It was always so peaceful, it was a place of comfort. There were times when I would forget where I was going and I would start to head home, back to Mom, as if I was making my way back from a day of reading. And then I would remember again.

I would get home and Lonnie would get at me in any way possible, sometimes it would be hitting me to the ground other times he would be ripping my clothes off. I wouldn't do anything about it - I couldn't do anything about it anyway. I would try to stop it sometimes. If I came home something was bound to happen so for a while I stopped coming home. Lonnie learned quickly and kept me on a tighter leash. I never blamed him, I could see in his blackened eyes that he was still there but he was just as unaware of what was happening as I was.

There were times where I had taken too much. Whenever that would

happen I would walk out to the woods. I knew the woods like the back of my hand, I knew what they were supposed to look like, even when my eyes were playing tricks on me. The fields in the distance would look like they were burning, so I would run home. I would climb into bed with Lonnie out of fear and he would try and comfort me the only way he knew how - sex.

I thought the only thing I could do to stop the cycle would be to become pregnant. I would tell myself that he would stop. I would get better. He would get better. We would get better. And even if he couldn't love me, at least he could love the child. It wasn't hard to convince him to not care about protection during sex. He didn't know what I was up to, he thought I was on the pill.

A few months went by and there was no luck. I was no longer unaware of what was happening and whenever it did happen I would feel myself shatter with pain. There was nothing to mask it anymore, I felt like I was forcing rape upon myself for his benefit. I could feel myself start to crack, they were right there, begging for me to take them, begging me to just wash away the pain. I couldn't be selfish like that.

Winter came and went with no news. The cycle continued and continued, until spring.

When I found out I didn't know whether to be overjoyed or saddened. I was having a child, I would become a mother. I could give me child the world, everything my parents failed to give me. But I was pregnant, out of wedlock with an abusive boyfriend.

One night I convinced him to elope after I had spiked his beer. I told him that night. He wanted to celebrate and in his drugged haze he went to do the only thing he knew how. I wouldn't let him do that to my child. I had endured his pain so it wouldn't have to.

When I told him he didn't care about the child, he cared about his 'victory'. I should have known then.

I should have left then.

4. Big God

Notes for the Chapter:

Big God - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kIrRooQwuk

Every time Lonnie would leave the house I would run to the phone. I would call Hopper, the rumour said that they had shipped him back early due to his mother's death. I knew it was wrong to call at such a bad time but if anyone could get me out it would be him. I was wondering when he would be back, she was to be buried here in Hawkins but New Jersey to Indiana was quite a journey. Maybe he was already on his way back and that was why he wasn't answering, he had never answered before, though.

Lonnie never found out that I was trying to get help, I was quite the actress, often pretending to be just as drunk as him so he wouldn't question me. It wouldn't always work, though. He could see through me at times, especially when I pretended to be asleep. He would still have his way with me, being half his size and constantly exhausted meant that I was never able to stop it. I would cry and weep and beg him to stop but he was on his high horse and he was never coming down.

Almost four months into the pregnancy I couldn't even see my natural skin colour, everywhere on my body had a purple discolouring. My face was red and covered with scratches and scars, I hadn't left the house for about a month. I didn't even know how long it had been, every single day would just be a repeat of the last. I would hope that Lonnie would eventually come home and be sober, clean as well, but that never happened.

He seemed to get worse, taking more joy in what he did to me. I had numbed myself from it, I didn't feel any pain anymore, it only hurt to think what he was doing to my child. Our child. He was capable of doing this to his unborn child. I assumed Hopper had come and gone by that point, I couldn't even try calling him anymore - I was alone.

Was it selfish of me to leave Lonnie? My child deserved to have a

father but Lonnie was no father. I hated to think if it was a boy or a girl. If it was a boy, Lonnie would take him under his wing and then my son would be a replica of his god awful father. If it was a girl he would treat her the same way he had treated me, I didn't know what was worse. I needed to leave. It was the best thing to do for me and the baby.

I just wanted him to love me but instead, he took out his anger. The house was in disrepair and all I wanted was his love - just an ounce of affection. I didn't care, I was numb - choosing to trap myself inside my own body rather than accept being locked in the house.

I needed to leave - for the baby.

5. Sky Full of Song

Notes for the Chapter:

Sky Full of Song - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1TSiB9OuVM>

With Lonnie gone a burden had been lifted off of my shoulders. I was finally able to be free, I was no longer confined to my own home. I was free because he wasn't, he was locked away somewhere for something I did not care about. And he would be staying there long enough for me to raise our child without his influence.

As much as I did enjoy being alone, it was impossible. I needed someone with me as I was going into the last weeks of my pregnancy. There weren't many people in Hawkins willing to help a girl who had gotten pregnant out of wedlock, had then kicked her husband out after being turned away by her parents. Karen? Maybe - but I couldn't ask her to do this after everything she had already done, it was the same with Benny.

I just wish my Dad would have let me in, it was always his decision that meant I was left with nothing. If he just disappeared or actually cared for me, he would've let me back in. If it was up to my mother I would be at home with her and she'd be supporting me every step of the way - but it wasn't up to her. She still had chances - chances to try and change his mind, chances to create opportunities to help me in any feasible way, yet she stayed silent. She didn't care either.

There was only one person left who I could turn to. Jim.

He'd been back for a while now. Apparently, he was out every night making a fool of himself before he was confined to the chains of marriage. I couldn't blame him, however, I knew where he was spending his time. I knew who he was most likely sleeping with, and all I could think about was that it could've been me. It could have been me he was fucking over for his own selfish pleasure. But I was pregnant, so it wasn't me and it wasn't my concern.

I just wanted it to go back to how it used to be when I knew what I

wanted to do with my life and everything was ahead of me. I just wanted somebody to look after me.

There came a point where being with someone was a necessity. The due date was constantly creeping closer and with that, problems arose. The pain was unbearable, so much so that I would be left crippled on the floor. I would often wake up in a pool of my own blood, my clothes had been stained red and there were blotches of sick everywhere.

There came a point where I thought death would be easier, ending it all would wash the pain away. Those thoughts were constant no matter how much I tried to ignore them. I tried a few times - tried to make it all stop. Alas, I would always wake up.

I just had to wait for the storm to pass so I could have the greatest joy of all.

6. Grace

Notes for the Chapter:

Grace - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgnWirJ1LUI>

I remember that day vividly. The day my baby would have been eighteen. Jonathan and Will were happily playing and Lonnie was supposedly at work. Grace was the only secret I kept. I had told Lonnie that I'd given her up for adoption so he wouldn't question me further about it. It was almost impossible to turn him away after that. No matter what happened he always seemed to worm himself back in, then Jonathan came into the world and four years later Will did too, so I had to let him stick around.

Every year I would walk alone into the woods to visit her grave under the willow tree by the brook. It was always so peaceful, it would give me time to think. I always wondered if there was any chance that I could still have the extravagant life I had always planned, maybe go to university so I wouldn't have to always refer to myself as a high school dropout. If I had the time, money and actual willingness, I would have gone, it would have made my mother proud.

Her anniversaries always left me depressed for weeks, but this one was different, she would have been an adult. She would be the one going onto university or college or whatever she wanted to do. But I was the one who prevented all that. I killed her. I murdered my own child because of my pure ignorance and stupidity.

There have always been times when I wish that I never became pregnant with her, I know its selfish but I couldn't face that pain, that guilt. I could never do that to myself, alas I did. However, even in her short time on Earth, she helped me so much, more than she would ever know. I wish I had told her how much I loved her before she left.

Sometimes I would contemplate going back to my old ways, especially when the guilt was unbearable. But I had promised her I

wouldn't inflict that on myself again if I did I would also be inflicting it on my boys. I wouldn't be able to live with myself if I did that.

Grace really did save me, just like Jim had, even if I didn't see either of them anymore. But Grace had her reason, I knew why she wouldn't come back but Jim had no valid reason. I knew at the time that he wasn't around because of Vietnam, something to do with Kennedy and the success of liberty, but even afterwards he never came back. Grace was the only one I could rely on to always help me.

She really was my saving grace.

7. Patricia

Notes for the Chapter:

Patricia - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slpYZtTpXZw>

It was only two days into the new year, 1980, when I received that phone call. It was supposed to be my year, Jonathan was due to become a teenager and Will was another year closer to hitting double digits. They were growing up too quickly for my liking. It was the hospital, my mother had been put into palliative care. After years of her torment, I didn't want to face her but my Aunt Darlene had passed away a few years earlier around the same time my Dad died.

I didn't even bother to go to his funeral, even though he was gone he would still find some way to reprimand me. I was the only person my mother had left.

In the end, I decided to go and see her, it was the right thing to do. I thought that maybe now that Dad was gone we could finally clear the air.

The moment I stepped into her room I could feel the judgement flooding over me. I tried to remind her that I was still her little girl and she would remind me of how many men I had slept with compared to how many I had married. Regardless I still loved her, she could say as much as she wanted and I would still prefer her over my father.

Being there in that room reminded me of how much I actually loved her and that I had neglected to tell her that for so long. I may have lost my mothers love when I chose to run away but I still carried her lessons with me the entire time, in fact, they made up the majority of the reasons why I came back to Hawkins.

She always told me to believe and to put faith in others and that would open doors for me, but Chicago completely disproved that. Even on her deathbed she still insisted that believing was always the cure. She still believed in God, she would praise him for giving her "a

lovely husband" but if God had anything to do with it he would have heard my endless prayers as a child. Prayers that begged him to stop my father's anger, the hitting, slapping, kicking and constant verbal hatred that was always directed at my mother until I was old enough to take part of the responsibility.

After a bit of talking my mother calmed down, the built-up hatred she had been withholding for years had finally been released. I always felt like I had let her down, she always had high hopes for me, the biggest one being to settle down with someone I actually loved. It pained me to tell her that I thought it would never happen.

Her response was very distinct and uncanny. It was words that I never thought would leave her mouth. She told me to go and find Jim, to uproot everything and go back to the city to find him. I couldn't believe that after the years of disrespect she had towards him she actually accepted him. She also said that after all those years I still loved him, even if I chose not to believe it. I thought she was going insane, the entire notion was preposterous.

A few days later whilst ringing up some items I overheard two women gossiping about something. Hawkins was small but somehow there was always some rumour to be spread. I wasn't intrigued at first until I heard Jim's name being bounced back and forth, mentions of a daughter and the police and him returning to Hawkins.

I was surprised - happy - but still surprised. The only problem was that after such a long time I had no idea how to even begin talking to him. And my mother enlightening thoughts didn't make the situation seem any easier.

8. 100 Years

Notes for the Chapter:

100 Years - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6GX0Zf4FMI>

I thought the darkest period of my life had already passed. I always thought lightning would never strike the same spot twice but in my case, it did. I can't even remember how I felt when I realised Will was missing. The emotional numbness wasn't new to me, I didn't even realise it was starting to take effect until I knew I had to go to the police.

It was selfish of me to even let the thought of not going to cross my mind. I had successfully avoided Hopper as much as I possibly could for three years and I wanted it to remain that way. But I couldn't do that to my boy, he was cold and alone in that place whilst I contemplated doing nothing just to avoid someone.

In the end, I went to the police. They weren't really much help in the grander scheme of things, only Jim was, but that's because he believed me. After years and years of having crazy branded on me, first by Lonnie and quickly picked up by the rest of the town, he saw that I wasn't. He saw that I had never gone off the rails willingly, he knew I was just a concerned mother wanting to know what had happened to her child.

Getting past square one allowed us to step further into the light on what was truly going on. With Jim's help, the bigger picture was starting to come together. The whole time I had been right, my boy was still out there somewhere. He was missing but he wasn't dead like they tried to tell us.

We knew that if we worked together we would be a lot more successful in finding information, maybe even getting Will back. Spending time with Jim wasn't as unpleasant as I had anticipated. Regardless of everything that had happened our bond somehow managed to remain the same. It got me thinking a lot about what my mother had said.

Everything seemed to be heading in the right direction until just before the sham funeral, Lonnie turned up. As much as I wanted to slam the door in his face the moment he arrived - I knew it wouldn't be fair, he believed our son was dead. But then I found out why he had really turned up, not for Will, Jonathan or me but for money. Lonnie had done bad things but so had I. I always thought everything that happened was me being punished for what I had done to him, Grace and my mother. But if I was being punished how were others such as Lonnie getting away with their crimes.

After threatening Brenner we were allowed to go and find Will. That place was a literal nightmare and my boy had been trapped there. Even after we bought him back home I could tell that it was still there, I could feel it lingering. There were still problems afterwards, Will started to have nightmares as did I. El had disappeared without me being able to thank her, she had simply just vanished.

Jim's support continued even after the whole debacle. Something new had forged between us and I couldn't put my finger on it. He started to visit often and I happily opened my home to him. There came a point where he suddenly became very busy, he told me it was work, but I knew something had happened. However, whenever I went to visit him at his trailer he was never there. I thought that he had gone back to his old rumoured ways so I stopped trying and went back to how life was without his help.

9. The End of Love

Notes for the Chapter:

The End of Love - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sO-YTZC-KQ8>

I would sometimes wonder if I had only chosen all this for the benefit of the children. The decision wasn't one that I took lightly. Love was something I had been searching for my entire life and although I had found it with my boys, I always wanted more. Lonnie and I were never in love, no matter how hard I tried, my heart had already been locked away. I guess that was why I knew even from the beginning that we would never work, everything else that happened was just an excuse to end it.

Becoming a family was a big decision but it definitely was the right one. Jane now had a real mother, someone who could really look after her the way only a mother can. I would sometimes worry that Jim only loved me for the sake of Jane's happiness. It was a dysfunctional family, all of us being too scared to try and love each other at first but we learnt to eventually. There were times where I wished something bad would happen between Jim and I, so everything could come crumbling down and I wouldn't have the constant burden of worrying if he really loved me or not.

In times like that, all I could think about was New York, how we were so naive yet so hopeful. It didn't matter how many times we failed we still had everything ahead of us and if I felt myself beginning to slip he would always catch me.

Coming back to Hawkins and then falling pregnant was one of the darkest points in my life. I lost count very quickly on how many times I had tried to kill myself, whether it be from an overdose, jumping from the balcony at the museum or letting Lonnie endlessly abuse me. Eventually, I gave up trying, I was so tired that I let complete numbness encapsulated me. Being numb meant I was no longer susceptible to the pain I endured on a daily basis, it allowed me to think about everything that had led to that point in time. At that point, I didn't have anything to love, my unborn child was most

likely dead and Lonnie loathed me. The only hope I had left was Jim because no matter how hard I tried to forget - I would always love him. I wasn't capable of loving anyone else in the way that I loved him. All that time passed and every second of it I knew how much I needed him yet he had no idea.

Bob was the only other person who I even considered loving. He was so good to me, he had the kindest soul and was willing to offer me everything I wanted. But then he was gone. Every time I thought about it I could feel the concoction of the familiar numbness and pain taking there effect on me but I learnt to just let it wash away and dismiss the thoughts of self-doubt.

10. No Choir

Notes for the Chapter:

No Choir - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_c3P-YWLpQ

The only person I'd ever felt true love with was now by my side. My whole life had been a sombre mess which somehow managed to turn to bliss. The doubts had left me and all I was capable of feeling was happiness. Jim and I would just sit together and do nothing but endlessly reflect on every single moment that had brought us to that particular space in time.

All those years ago we decided to leap at the unknown, hoping that if we didn't reach it something would be there to catch us when we fell. And that something was each other. I confess that I broke that, we said we would always do it together, but I left for my own selfish reasons. I only realised I needed him back when the loneliness was becoming too much. However, I told myself that although I may have needed him, it didn't mean I had to love him. But I did still love him, even if I chose not to believe it.

I knew our love would never be the purest or fervent - but it was still love.

Even if we were due to leave Earth in the near future, at least we had our moment in New York where nothing else mattered but each other. At least we were truly happy then.

Everything we had faced together, everything we had accomplished would be a faint a memory to never be seen or heard again. Everything, including us, would be entirely forgotten.